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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on Wednesday evening 29.7.70

Hymns: 765, 812, 462

Reading: Numbers 9 (from v.8)

Text: Psalm 48.14

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death"

I am quite aware that this may be more than some would feel able to say, that is with the assurance that they would desire without presuming, to say that this God is my God for ever and ever. I do not doubt that there are many, many of the Lord's people of whom this is blessedly true who may not feel able to say it to their satisfaction in a personal sense. On the other hand there may be many who just take things for granted and assume that it is so. It is a mercy to have an exercise in our souls about this all important matter because our eternal destiny hinges upon whether this God is our God or no. What an awful thing it is to live and die careless about this matter, to have no soul exercise, no prayer, no waiting upon the Lord in the language of the Psalmist, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation". I believe I can say that these waiting ones who stand in doubt of their own personal case could say, "I should be a happy person indeed if I could really feel that the Lord is my God", saying with the hymnwriter,

"My God, My Father blissful name
O may I call Thee mine,
May I with sweet assurance claim
A Portion so divine?"

If you receive that portion do not brush it aside as though it was not just precisely what you had set down. We can bring a darkness by brushing aside what the Lord has done or what He may be doing now, if it is not just exactly what we anticipate. We have wonderful cause to bless the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob if there is a ray of light in our poor dark hearts, for nature will never put it there; and I am disposed to say this, although I do not want you to settle in it, if the Lord was not your God then I do not believe you would have prayerful concern about the matter. The fact that you have to some

point been emptied from vessel to vessel and felt a death upon this poor world in your soul and are panting for Christ, as we have been singing in the first hymn, is not that an evidence that the Lord is your God? Even so, you will want the Lord to make it clear in your own heart, for much of the religion of the Lord's living family consists in this anxious, prayerful desire to read their title clear to mansions in the skies. It is a mercy to have a positive religion, that is, not to rest ourselves in negatives, although we are not to despise them; but we do need a religion with something positive in it from the Lord God of Israel for our comfort, strength and help in this our wilderness journey.

The God here referred to is the God of Zion. In the Psalm the author refers to mount Zion and the beauty of worship. He illustrates symbolically things about Zion, her towers, bulwarks, pillars and so on and then says this God is our God, so that we shall not know God savingly, or prove Him to be our God, only as the God of Zion, that is spiritually speaking, for we read of it like this in a later Psalm, "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision I will satisfy her poor with bread". So that if you find the Lord to your comfort you will find Him in Zion. I do not mean that you will necessarily find Him in Chapel, although you may, and many have; many, many have done in the ordinances of His house; but some have found the Lord to their joy and peace of soul in their homes, some walking the streets, and some about their daily calling. The Lord is not confined to material buildings like this, but if and when you find the Lord you will find Him to be the Lord God of Zion - that is, He will incorporate you among the number whom He has eternally chosen to be His spiritual church. This is the Zion actually in a Gospel sense, and this is where He reveals His glory, His mercy, His grace, His love, and visits His people. This God is our God.

I wonder if you have ever had a spot in your life when, feeling some particular word with a saving effect upon your spirit, you have been drawn to Him with some brokenness, repentance, faith and love

and have said, "This God is my God". O that is a blessed moment. It is a blessed moment because it is a seal of heaven in your heart. This does not mean you will not get to heaven unless you feel it to your satisfaction; but if you get a word that fills you, and brings you to His blessed feet, then you have the knowledge of His blessed salvation by the remission of your sins. He will not bring His love into your poor heart if He has not forgiven you. He deals with His poor people as forgiven ones and some day that sweet sense of His pardoning love comes into and fills the heart.

"This God is our God" - This is the God we read of in the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation; here He is - the God of the Scriptures, the God of Zion. There are not two Gods, although they are in a Trinity of Persons; in their mode of subsistence they are one God in Zion. This is the Gospel. This God is our God. In the Scriptures we read of Him as Almighty God. This Almighty God is our God. This is what the Lord said to Abraham when He appeared to him, saying "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect" - that is, upright, sincere, humble in the fear of God. It is a mercy to have an Almighty God for our God. He is not a creature but is that divine Creator of all creatures of whom there are millions upon millions, while there is only one Creator. There is only one Almighty Being - I AM THAT I AM.

Does it seem far too much for you to realise that this God Whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, and of Whom we read that He fills heaven and earth, and that He is an Infinite Being (as the Psalmist says in Psalm 139, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?") - How can it be true you may say that this God is our God? Is He not far too high, too great? Not at all; for this same God, this "High and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" - not a high towering professor or one thought a lot of in the religious world, but a poor thing who can say from his heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner", - that is where He dwells. Surely it cannot be so,

say you; surely it is so because the Lord says so, this Almighty God. Then when you can feel this, as we have it in the prophet Jeremiah, where the Lord says, "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?", you can look at your difficulties burdens, anxieties, mountains, prospects, future, and many other things, and if you get a little lifting up in your heart you will see Omnipotence above them all. What do you do then? Why you "Commit your way to Him" and "Cast your care upon Him". He is this Almighty God; but you may have to say all this is too much for me. You may have a hard thing that you have to walk in, you may have a very sharp thorn in your lot, a very bitter ingredient in your cup, but here is an Almighty God; He knows what to do with the thorn or bitter ingredient in your cup. Take it to Him, "I am the Almighty God". What instances have been in the Scriptures of this. Not only so, but He is an infinite and Omnipotent Being. He has a perfect knowledge of all things. You cannot send up a groan to heaven without the Lord knowing, although you may say He takes no notice. That is another point; but how are you able to say He takes no notice? Because, say you, I get no answer. That may be for the time being, but we read that they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, that He heard them, and delivered them out of their distresses. There is a trial of faith sometimes. Even Jeremiah a prophet of the Lord got very low when he said, "Wilt Thou be altogether unto me as a liar?" (Jeremiah 15.18). You have never been there surely? Perhaps you say, sometimes everything seems called into question, everything, and I feel as though I am sinking into a state of awful confusion; yet this God is your God. He knows where you are; but I sink so low, you say. He knows all about that. Where does He put His arms when these poor things are sinking so low that they fear they will never rise again? He puts His arms underneath them; you will not fall through them. This God is Almighty, Omniscient, Just and Holy. That first song that was sung after the children of Israel were delivered from their enemies, was sung on the other side of the Red Sea. They did not sing that song this side of the Red Sea; no it was all very different

then; they said, "Would that we had died in Egypt", and other very sad things; but afterwards, when they saw what the Lord had done for them they sung His praises. Moses and the children of Israel sung His praises as a "man of war" who had fought the battle for them, and this is a part of the song, "glorious in holiness". This is what God is; although this was a problem with Habakkuk when he said, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" and yet to him the Lord appeared to be allowing things to go on. It seems like that in this country. But the time soon came when the land was ravaged by those terrible and dreadful Chaldeans. This God is our God.

Although He is just and holy, He is also a God of love, He is love. It is said, "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love" (1 John 4.8). There is a majesty in all this; there is a glory in His holiness, there is a glory in His law; but there is a surpassing glory in the Gospel. God glorifies Himself in His judgments upon the ungodly, He glorifies Himself in His holy righteous law, which claims our obedience to Him as His creatures; but there is a glory in the Gospel which surpasses all beside, eclipses everything else. This is the glory of God in Christ, in the communications of mercy, grace and love to poor guilty sinners. What an amazing thought is this. But there is something else about this God too, and that is He is a prayer-hearing and answering God. Some of you may perhaps feel inclined to say that He does not answer yours but you should not say that. Do not say these things hastily; do not come to premature conclusions about God, for He has an appointed time to manifest His grace, to reveal His love, to respond to a poor sinner's cries. He is a prayer-hearing God; O how many have been a witness to this in their providences even, and more particularly in their souls' experiences when the sweet light of heaven has pierced the darkness, when the shadows have fled and the sweet light of heaven has shone into the soul, when the Lord Jesus has been as the light of the morning, as a morning without clouds. This God. This God Who sent His beloved Son to redeem us. There has never been an act of love to compare with this. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a

man lay down his life for his friends."

Then there is this, "He will be our guide even unto death". He is our God not merely and only while we are down here below struggling through this wilderness, but for ever and ever; not for just a short space of time down here but for ever. If the Lord is not your God while you are here on earth He will never be your God in glory. There must be a preparation down here. There must be that good Spirit's work in the heart to convince us of our sins and bring us out of the desert of this poor dying world; but if you hear a still small voice which gives you a hope that He is your God down here, though you may be tempest-tossed at times, and not comforted, then He will be your God in heaven. Not long ago I was speaking at a place in the country and there was a man sitting at the back of the building who seemed as though he was trying to hear me. I spoke to him afterwards and said, "I am afraid you could not hear me". He said, "I heard every word I have no trouble to hear you". I said, "Have you ever heard in your heart a still small voice?". Somewhat moved he said, "I believe I have", and he turned away. I knew he had by the way he responded. His heart seemed to soften and I felt a love to that man. He did not make any great boast of himself, he said, "I believe I have". Have you ever heard anything? If you have, this God is your God, because He will never depart from or go back upon His Word. If He raises up to a hope, if this good Spirit makes Christ precious in your poor soul, the devil will attack it. There is nothing makes him draw his sword more than when a poor sinner feels something of the preciousness of Christ. This inveterate foe hates the Lord Jesus. O, say you, if only I knew He was my Saviour I feel I could love Him. Well you love Him now.

"This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death! In this sense viewed He will be our guide while we are down here. He says so. This is the language of the church; but there is a higher authority than this, and the Lord informs us how He will guide His people. In an earlier Psalm by His servant He says "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye". It does not say, 'I will

guide somebody else', but "I will guide thee with mine eye". It is also said that His eye is upon His people, upon them that fear Him; His eye is upon them. We need grace to view this rightly, for the eye of God is an omniscient eye; it is everywhere, He has a perfect knowledge of all things. "I will guide thee with mine eye". How sweet that was to Asaph after all that he had been through, when he said, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory". It brought him out of his turmoil of mind; "and afterward receive me to glory". This eye indicates a watchful providence over all our things, a continual providence. There is an eye that watches over all our matters, all our things; He guides. Is not this beautifully set forth in the case of the children of Israel when they were in the wilderness? This is why I read that portion of Scripture; when they were brought out of Egypt they did not know the way, it was a matter of bringing the blind by a way that they knew not. How did the Lord do this? He caused a pillar of a cloud to appear before them by day, and a pillar of fire by night. The pillar of cloud and fire was a symbol of the Lord's presence, and that His eye was upon His ancient people to guide them; for, as you know, when the cloud moved forward, whether it was by day or night, they were to prepare to follow it, even if it only rested for a day or so; or if it rested long, when it lifted and began to move forward, they were to follow it. To go before it would have been presumption, and not to follow it would have been a wilful neglect of the Lord's command; for it was at the command of the Lord they journeyed, and at the command of the Lord they rested in their tents. They were not to run before Him, but they were not to stand still when the cloud went forward. He guided them. It is said in another Psalm that "He fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands" (Ps. 78.72). These are figures to show His watchful care, His eye, His hands are mentioned in this matter of guiding His poor people. Do you feel like the Psalmist said, "For Thy name's sake lead me and guide me"?. That is the best place to be in.

But not only does the Lord guide with His eye, not only does He guide with His hands but with His voice. In the prophecy we find, "~~Though~~ the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it". This is a voice from heaven, a word from the Lord, "This is the way walk ye in it". So it is in these ways the Lord guides His people. "Walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left". Good old Daniel Smart used to say it is always safest to keep to the middle of the road for there are dangers if we turn to the right or if we turn to the left. "He will be our guide even unto death", then and there. O but, say you, how am I to know? When you hear His voice, when you feel that hand as it were leading you, when you see that eye watching you, He will be your guide even unto death, and then He will be your guide into the realms of everlasting bliss. We shall need Him to guide us all the way until we come to the verge of Jordan, and then to land us on Canaan's happy land for ever. Then we shall be beyond all the snares and difficulties and burdens and temptations of this poor world here, for the former things will have passed away, and we shall be there where He is as we read, and shall be with Him for ever and ever. He is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death". Amen.